



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

3 February 2014

Mr. Timothy J. Van Norman  
Chief, Branch of Permits  
Division of Management Authority  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
4401 North Fairfax Drive  
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Permit Application No. 13110B  
(BBC, Natural History Unit)

Dear Mr. Van Norman:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). The BBC proposes to film northern sea otters in 2014.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service issue the permit, as requested.

## **RATIONALE**

The BBC is requesting authorization to take up to four individual sea otters twice per day by Level B harassment during filming activities in Cordova Harbor, Alaska. Filming would occur during an approximate 12-day period in March and 9-day period in May 2014. Sea otters could be of either sex and any age. The applicant would use footage as part of a BBC documentary to educate the public on the natural history of Alaskan wildlife, including sea otters, throughout all four seasons.

Two BBC cameramen would use high-definition video and still cameras to film and photograph the otters. Filming would be conducted primarily on shore from the harbor docks and a spit. They also could use a small boat and an underwater pole camera. A former Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) biologist would be operating the boat. After a few days of filming at the surface and using the pole camera, a qualified cameraman would be deployed to film the otters underwater using SCUBA. Underwater filming using SCUBA would occur for no more than seven days during each filming period. The cameramen have extensive experience filming wildlife, including underwater filming in the Arctic. Further, BBC will work closely with FWS biologists and the Cordova harbormaster during the proposed filming activities.

Although the sea otters in Cordova Harbor are habituated to humans, the cameramen would approach the animals no closer than 50 m and would allow the sea otters to approach them at closer distances. They would use re-breather diving gear during underwater filming activities to minimize disturbance. The BBC indicated that its primary consideration would be to avoid influencing or

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changing an otter's natural behaviors. If the filming activities disrupt an otter that is feeding, breeding, or nursing, the cameramen would cease their activities immediately and slowly move away from the otter. In addition, they would not separate a female and her pup.

The Commission supports the filming of marine mammals as films can be an important means of educating the public about these animals, their natural history, and the value of conserving them. Because of the precautionary manner in which the BBC would conduct the filming activities, the Commission recommends that the FWS issue the permit, as requested.

The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA.

The Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit application. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca J. Lent". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "Lent" at the end.

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.  
Executive Director